

Afghanistan

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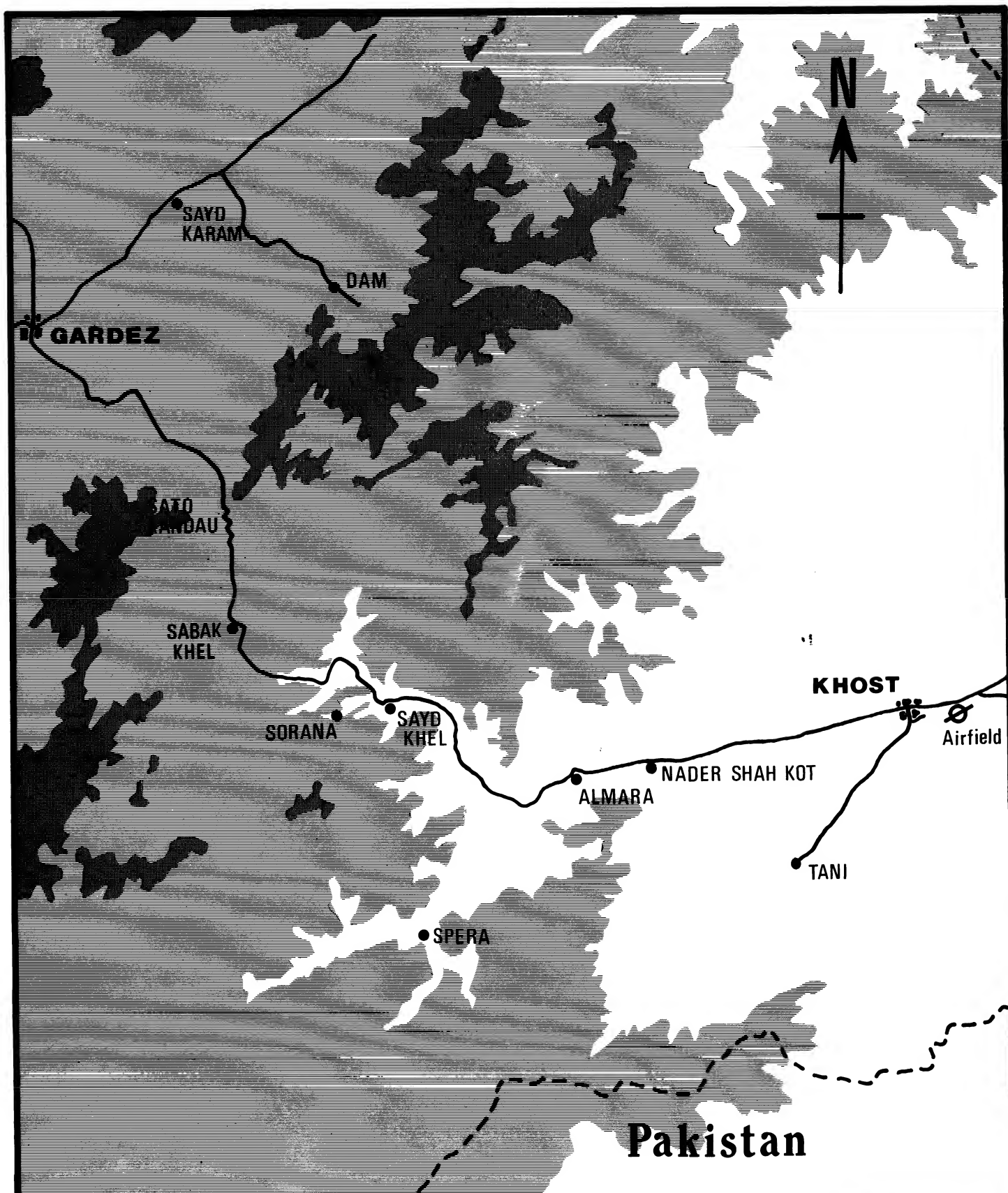
SOVIET WITHDRAWAL IN SIGHT?

WITH THE RUSSIAN MUJAHIDEEN

Radek Sikorski

ANDY SKRZYPKOWIAK

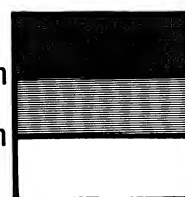
Julian Gearing



GARDEZ-KHOST ROAD

(SEE FEATURE ON PAGE 14)

3000m
2000m



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EDITORIAL

The guerrillas fighting the Soviet and Afghan government forces in Afghanistan are often described by the media as 'Western-backed rebels based in Pakistan'. While few would dispute the fact that the guerrillas have been supplied principally by the United States, Saudi Arabia and China, and that the main political parties have their headquarters in Pakistan, including some bases close to the border, this is only part of the story.

What is potentially dangerous is to use this picture in efforts to try to resolve the conflict. If it were simply a matter of an end to Western arms supplies and a guerrilla leadership which could be dictated to in Pakistan, then working out acceptable conditions for a Soviet withdrawal might not prove to be too difficult. To judge by the 'latest round of optimism' surrounding the possibility of a withdrawal we could be forgiven for thinking that peace is just around the corner. But it is not.

The most overlooked element is that of the role and power of the commanders of the guerrilla groups based far inside the country. Many of these groups have been fighting for years without having become totally dependent on outside aid. And partly because of this they are less easily controlled by outside backers. They do not sit waiting for truck-loads of ammunition to arrive before they are able to go off to battle, as seen recently in Paktia and Nangarhar.

And it is this relative independence which gives them the freedom to choose whether or not to go along with an agreement imposed on them from outside. Why should they put down their arms if such an agreement results in a poor compromise?

The acid test of an agreement signed at Geneva is whether the refugees will go back home. Many will not be willing to take the risk if there is fighting and chaos.

Therefore the negotiating process must involve not only the guerrilla leaders based in Pakistan, but also the major commanders inside the country. While this will prove a difficult task, and will inevitably take time, there may be no alternative if there is to be any chance for peace in Afghanistan.

Julian Gearing

Editor



Mujahideen graves, Nasir Bagh, Pakistan. Photo: Ben Edwards.

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SOVIET WITHDRAWAL IN SIGHT?

The possibility of a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan has received a great deal of publicity in recent months. But what does this really mean for Afghanistan? In this special feature we look at some of the factors involved and highlight some of the problems still to be solved.

STRUGGLE FOR CONTROL

Julian Gearing

Afghanistan is tottering on the brink of chaos. Despite the clear message from Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, that his forces could soon be heading for home if an agreement is signed at Geneva, little attention has been given to the power vacuum that may be left behind. In his

speech on 8th February, Gorbachev stated that the withdrawal was not subject to the setting up of an interim government. He stated that this was "... none of our business, or yours, for that matter".

But if there is no agreement on the nature of an interim govern-

ment, to be in place from the day the projected withdrawal begins, this will leave the present Kabul regime in power. And if Mohammad Najib's People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) remains in power, in whatever form, then the country will be plunged into civil war.

Paradoxically the problem has been exacerbated by the peace process which has been working for a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Since the Geneva talks began in 1982, the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan, sitting in separate rooms, have diverted attention from the main parties to the conflict — the Soviet Union and the Afghan guerrillas: the Mujahideen.

The Pakistan government's involvement in the talks is an indication of their sincere desire to end the war. Apart from the burden of over 3 million Afghan refugees on its soil, the effects of PDPA sponsored subversion and the pressure from its opposition parties has put President Zia's government squarely in the firing line. The Pakistan wish for peace is genuine, but they have shown themselves to be deeply reluctant to sign the agreement that is now available at the 'final round' of talks in Geneva.

Far from blocking the road to peace, as some critics have described the Pakistani position, their insistence on the need to work out the composition of an interim government as part of a deal shows that their understanding of the situation is grounded in reality. If this question is not addressed, they realise that there could be a civil war. Such a conflict would not be confined within the borders of Afghanistan and could gravely threaten the stability of Pakistan itself.



Mujahideen: present on the battlefield but excluded from negotiations. Photo: Peter Jovenal.

THE QUESTION OF A FUTURE GOVERNMENT FOR AFGHANISTAN

Olivier Roy

If there is a real Soviet will to find a political solution, it remains to be seen what is possible. Until now the Soviets have considered the only framework for a future government in Afghanistan to be that of 'national reconciliation'. What does this mean? It means that the centre of power will remain in the hands of the PDPA, who will be, according to the constitution, the leading party of Afghanistan, and will hold the main ministries (defence, interior, foreign affairs) and keep control of the security and armed forces. In this framework, coalition government will mean that some portfolios, and maybe the majority, will be held by non-party or other party ministers; but these ministries will have no political weight (such as Health, private business, light industries, etc.). The regime will remain communist in fact, if not in word. Let us not forget that this is the way the communists swallowed non-communists in East Europe from 1945 to 1948. Even now there are Social-democrat and Christian-democrat parties in East Germany.

In this scenario, the Soviet Union will either create new small non-communist parties, or, more probably, try to attract some token splinter groups from the main resistance parties (which was the case in East Germany). In the field they will go on with their policy to attract some local commanders by paying them.

Such a 'coalition government' is of course absolutely unacceptable to the resistance, because it will just be a new stage before the total sovietization of Afghanistan; Pakistan and the United States seem unlikely to agree on that basis. During the debate at the UN last November, the Soviet Union failed to convince the third-world countries that this policy leads to a real coalition government, therefore the Soviets need a decisive military victory to impose such a plan.

At the same time, the resistance is slowly heading towards a provisional government, to be established either in Peshawar or in some liberated areas. This process needs some time to be achieved, but is such a government a viable solution? The first drawback is that the Peshawar alliance does not include the Shi'as; so not only the Hazaras but also Iran will not recognise such a government. The other problem is that such a government could be installed in Kabul only in case of a total military victory, or in the case of a sudden Soviet withdrawal, leaving the PDPA regime without any military protection. This scenario is unlikely, in the present conditions.

The fact is that no side could hope for an absolute military victory. Settlements to guerrilla wars in the past thirty years (such as Algeria and Vietnam) have shown clearly that future governments have had little to do with what has actually been established by a peace treaty, however such peace treaties were, in the past, the only way to break unbearable stalemates.

So it is clear that the establishment of a peace treaty appointing a new kind of transitional government will be more an agreement between super and/or regional powers to break the stalemate than the basis on which Afghanistan will be ruled in future. If we accept this limitation, then what scenarios are acceptable to both sides? There are two: either a real coalition

government, or a transitional government headed by neutral figures.

If the future settlement is made on the basis of a coalition government, one can speculate, and there will be long discussions, on the percentage of each side on the government (half communists, half Mujahadeen, or a third of Mujahadeen, a third of neutral, a third of communists, or just a symbolic presence of communists). The key question is that of the security and armed forces (the KHAD, the army and the airforce). If the communists retain control of them, they could play on the differences between the resistance parties, on the inevitable feuds among field commanders (based on political, ethnic or even personal rivalries), to split the resistance and fuel a civil war, which will allow the Soviet Union to retain a right of intervention. In this case the peace treaty will just delay the sovietization of Afghanistan. But in any event a real coalition government will not be practical: one side will necessarily have just a token presence. The winner will be the one with the military power. So it is important not to disarm the resistance.

A neutral government, made up of non-party personalities, will have the advantage of not leaving the armed forces in the hands of the communists. But such a government will necessarily be transitional, because of its lack of roots among the armed resistance. There will be a difference only if this government is headed by the former king, Zahir Shah, because he has some support among the Pashtun tribes, the old establishment and the local notables. But he is opposed by most of the field commanders, especially in the north, so there is a danger of civil war.

Such a neutral government, made up of Afghan personalities now in exile, supported by a UN peace-keeping force, and eventually headed by Zahir Shah, could supervise the departure of the Soviet troops, and ensure law and order in Kabul. However such a government will be seen by the field commanders as the return of the old regime and it will therefore lack legitimacy to rule in the long run.

How will a new government, of whatever type, gain its legitimacy? There are stories about a *jirgah*, but national *jirgahs* in Afghanistan are more a myth than a reality. Two rulers only were confirmed by a *jirgah* (Ahmed Shah Durrani and Nader Khan). Moreover, *jirgahs* are tribal institutions and thus resented by non-Pashtun people as a new way to impose on them the old Pashtun rule. It would be a dream to think that general and free elections could be held in Afghanistan in the short run. Any *jirgah* would be made up of notables, especially tribal ones.

So the key for the legitimisation of any future government is in the hands of the field commanders. If they are excluded from any settlement, no government will last in Afghanistan.

Olivier Roy is a French scholar and renowned authority on Afghanistan. He has travelled widely throughout the country during the war.

This article is part 2 of a series on the possibilities for a future government of Afghanistan.

For Pakistan the acid test of any agreement will be whether or not the refugees return to their homes in Afghanistan. If the result of an agreement in Geneva is civil war and chaos, few would do so. Indeed, many more refugees could flood across the border in such a scenario.

But external and domestic pressure has forced Pakistan into a corner. The United States in particular has been trying to persuade Pakistan to sign the Geneva accords. President Reagan, in his final year in office, appears keen to be viewed as the man who ousted the Soviet

forces from Afghanistan. His stand is echoed by many other Western leaders.

What appears to be misunderstood or ignored is that the presence of Soviet troops is not the only obstruction in the way of peace. The reason many of the guerrilla

leaders started fighting in the first place, well before the entry of Soviet soldiers, was because of what they saw as a threat from communism. As far back as the late 1960s, the stage was being set for a conflict between young radical communist supporters on the one side and those who joined the Islamic revival movement on the other.

Without the extraordinary persistence of the Islamic guerrilla movement, Afghanistan would have been 'pacified' years ago. Yet at no time have they been directly involved in the peace negotiations. Strangely this has, in part, been due to their backers, primarily the United States, Saudi Arabia, and China, who have been willing to give the guerrillas military support but not political recognition.

This problem appears to stem from what is seen as a lack of unity. Even now, working under the banner of the Islamic Unity of Afghan Mujahideen, the seven major party leaders are seldom able to agree on many important issues. At this crucial juncture, the Alliance has found it very difficult to iron out their differences on the form of interim government they would like to see in Kabul, from the day Soviet forces start to leave Afghanistan. The 'moderate' parties complain that the 'fundamentalists' are carrying the day, and that their wishes are being trampled underfoot. But it is the 'fundamentalists' who are the real cutting edge on the ground inside Afghanistan.

However, a major mistake is being made in expecting the guerrillas to put up a unified front. Unity is a Western concept which is alien to Afghanistan. Even in modern Western democracies, political alliances seldom work. At no time in its history has the country worked as a homogenous unit. To expect this to happen during a time when the country is racked by war is just wishful thinking.

Yet outside elements, whether it is the United States, Pakistan, or India, still insist on trying to impose alien ideas on the Afghans. Up until the beginning of the latest round of Geneva talks, a compromise solution to the question of the interim government appeared to have much currency. What was suggested was a government composed of one third guerrillas, one third PDPA, and one third refugees. It was proposed that the leader to stand in during this transitional stage would be the ex-king, Zahir Shah, exiled by a coup in 1973. To outsiders this might sound an excellent compromise,

SACRIFICING 'THE OX'?

Floris van Straaten

Najib, dubbed 'the Ox' because of his bulky appearance, used to take pride in being called 'Comrade Doctor'. He now no longer expects people to address him like this.

In a similar break with the past, the communist party boss starts his speeches these days with the traditional Islamic invocation: "In the name of Allah, the beneficent and merciful". Only a year ago, such concessions to the Afghan people would have been unthinkable. They are part of Najib's controversial plan of 'national reconciliation', an elaborate attempt to lure Afghans to his side.

Although there is no evidence so far that Najib is truly interested in sharing power with the non-communist opposition (let alone in stepping down), he has taken some largely symbolic steps aimed at improving his standing with the majority of Afghans. While it seems unlikely that Najib's concessions have prompted many Afghans to revise their opinion of him, they have certainly triggered fierce protests from more conservative circles in the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA).

Many members of both Najib's own Parcham (the Banner) faction and of the rival Khalq (the Masses) faction are said to be strongly opposed to the concept of 'national reconciliation', which they regard as a sell-out.

Western diplomats reported that hostility to Najib's policies were particularly strong among provincial party cadre. The lower officials, mainly Khalqis, are against any departure from the orthodox communist principles of the so-called 'Saur revolution' of 1978, when the PDPA took power.

In true Afghan fashion, since its foundation in 1965, the party has always been profoundly divided between bickering factions. Factionalism has been strong despite the PDPA's narrow base of support.

The regime itself claims that the PDPA currently has 180,000 members. However, a Soviet diplomat stated last

summer that there were not more than 113,000 members, of which some 50,000 were active. Western observers consider the latter figure as rather optimistic.

Najib has every reason to take the internal resistance to his policies seriously. He may have dealt some heavy blows to his political foes within the PDPA recently, but his position in the party remains fragile. Ever since he came to power in May 1986, he has faced stiff opposition from broad sections of the party. Many Khalqis refused to forgive him for the cruelties committed against them by the Afghan secret service, KHAD, which Najib headed for six years. At the same time, within his own Parcham faction, supporters of his predecessor Babrak Karmal resented the fact that their leader had been pushed aside unceremoniously.

In the absence of a strong constituency of his own, Najib had to tread very cautiously. He waited for about a year before taking on his most direct adversaries, the Karmal loyalists in the Parcham faction.

He found the Soviet Union ready to accept Karmal for 'medical treatment' in May, and so rid himself of the focal point of opposition within the Parchamis. Simultaneously, he kept the Khalqis at bay by releasing a number of their colleagues from the notorious Poli-Charki jail. Some Khalqis were also reinstated in junior positions within the local bureaucracy.

Initially, the reaction of the Karmal loyalists to the expulsion of their leader was strong. Several bomb blasts in Kabul shortly afterwards were generally attributed to frustrated Karmal supporters. But the ferocity of their protests soon withered away.

In October, Najib judged it safe to remove the remaining Karmal loyalists from the higher party echelons. At the second Party conference, he had Karmal's protege and only senior female Afghan politician, Dr Anahita Ratebzad, ousted from the Central Committee as well as Karmal's half-brother

especially as the popularity of the ex-king appeared high in a poll carried out in a number of refugee camps.

But opposition to Zahir Shah is strong. Far from being a popular symbol of unity, the 73-year-old former monarch has the reputation for being weak and indecisive, and obviously lacks any real power-base in Afghanistan today. While he is acceptable to some Afghans, primarily the Pushtun tribes of the south, to the ethnic minorities of the

north, centre and west he represents Pushtun domination.

However, it is the Islamic 'fundamentalists' in all ethnic groups who are most strongly opposed to him. To them he is the head of a corrupt outdated order which paved the way for the influx of communism and led to the Soviet invasion. He has been conspicuously absent from the conflict. Even without communists in an interim government, his arrival in Kabul could result in chaos and bloodshed.

Mahmoud Baryalai and nine other communist members.

Diplomatic sources said that at the provincial level, many party officials from Karmal's days were also dismissed on charges of corruption. In addition, at least 80 Karmal supporters were reported to have been arrested.

But even though Karmal himself has lived in political exile in the Soviet Union since May, he remains a force to be reckoned with in the communist

supporters were planning to start a breakaway communist party.

Under the new constitution that was approved by the Kabul Loya Jirgah, it would indeed be possible to found such a party. If the Karmal loyalists went ahead with their own party, this could cause Najib considerable embarrassment.

Meanwhile, Najib's relations with the Khalqis are hardly any better. In spite of the relative quiet between Najib and

Although some Khalqis have criticized him for this, their foremost leader, Muhammad Gulabzoi, has been Interior Minister in the Parchami government for years.

Gulabzoi is a formidable opponent for Najib. The Khalqi leader is often said to run an administration of his own, parallel to and independent of the government's. An important instrument in Gulabzoi's hands are the Sarandoi, a 30,000 strong special police force that is subordinated to the Interior Minister. Gulabzoi frequently deploys the Sarandoi against his opponents.

It was rumoured that the release of hundreds of prominent Khalqis from prison this year was partly meant to sow discord among the Khalqis. However, released Gulabzoi rivals such as former foreign minister Dr Shawari joined Gulabzoi and no fresh splits have occurred in the Khalqi faction.

Looking at the PDPA from the Soviet point of view, Najib has probably not lived up to their expectations. Despite his dynamic approach, not unlike Mikhail Gorbachev's in the Soviet Union, the internal rifts in the party are deeper than before he came to power. Twelve months after the launch of 'national reconciliation', the results remain unimpressive, even by the regime's own admission.

Although Najib has managed to oust many of his enemies in the higher ranks of the party, internal opposition to him remains widespread. In addition, he is still highly unpopular among the Afghans at large. In contrast to Karmal's case, few PDPA members would stand up for Najib if he was replaced by the Soviets.

Nonetheless, there is little evidence that the Soviets are losing patience with Najib. Apparently Moscow did not object to Najib's elevation to President last autumn, even though this was bound to undermine the credibility of the PDPA's policy of 'national reconciliation'.

However, Afghanistan watchers do not entirely discard the theory that the Soviets are only strengthening Najib's position now in order to make sacrificing him later look like a bigger concession on their part. According to this theory it is only a matter of time before the Russians will sacrifice 'the Ox'.



President Mohammad Najib (left) with Wali Khan at the funeral of Ghaffur Khan in Jalalabad, Afghanistan. Photo: Floris van Straaten.

party. As one of the founders of the PDPA and long-time head of the Parchami faction, Karmal had managed to build a strong constituency within the party and Najib has been unable to undo this entirely.

Journalists at the Loya Jirgah, a national assembly of elders carefully selected by the regime, in Kabul last November reported that the capital was awash with rumours that former Karmal

the Khalqis so far, the old mutual enmity and mistrust remains. Some western diplomats did not rule out that after purging most Karmal loyalists from the higher ranks of the party, Najib would concentrate on suppressing the Khalqi opposition.

Despite Parchami control of the government for the past eight years, the Khalqis have managed to maintain considerable influence within the cabinet.

Afghan society has changed dramatically during the years of war. The power of the mullahs, maliks and khans has been eroded by young radicals who are increasingly pushing themselves into positions of power.

The question of who should rule has put tremendous strain on the fragile Alliance. Unable to decide on a candidate from their own ranks, the leaders have chosen a man with no real power, Ahmad Shah, who just prior to his appointment acted

as an interpreter to an NBC film crew. A conflict of views has threatened to break up the Alliance at a time when they should be seen to be working together.

In December 1979 the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan to prop up and bring under control a communist regime in Kabul that was in danger of collapse. Eight years on, after devastating the country, they may be about to cut their losses and withdraw. But it remains to be seen whether or not they are really willing

to give up all they have invested in Afghanistan. Equally, will Gorbachev really abandon the Brezhnev doctrine? What does seem clear is that the Soviet Union is keen to leave behind a heavily armed and protected regime in Kabul.

Yet the views of the PDPA and the guerrillas on the type of government they want in Afghanistan remain totally irreconcilable. Both sides look unlikely to give much ground. As guerrilla commander Abdul Haq pointed out, "Even if

outside aid ceases, we will continue to fight if there is a communist regime in Kabul”.

There is a danger here that the United States may have been beguiled by its own propaganda. If there is a civil war, it is not a foregone conclusion that the present government in Kabul will rapidly collapse. While most guerrilla leaders say that it would take only a couple of months at most to dispose of the Kabul government, this would not necessarily be the case in the conditions of a chaotic civil war.

Although the regime in Kabul has little real support amongst the population of Afghanistan, it still has considerable military muscle and a security service which has the potential to cause havoc, both inside Afghanistan and across the border in Pakistan. Western estimates put the strength of the regime's armed forces at around 40,000 army personnel, supplemented by the Sarandoy police force of the Ministry of the Interior, the 70,000 strong KHAD and a Soviet trained air force. In addition the local militias could number between 100,000 – 200,000 men. Even if Soviet aid to the Kabul government were to be cut off, according to Western estimates existing stockpiles could last as long as three years.

For their part, the Soviet Union continues to heavily back the PDPA. They have invested millions of roubles in the country. Their attempts at ‘pacification’ appear to be having success in some areas of the north of the country. There are reports that they have even been bypassing the PDPA and directly funding Afghan militia groups and local governors. The military infrastructure that the Soviet Union has built up, such as the heavily fortified bases at Shindand, Bagram, Kabul, Kunduz, and Mazar-i-Sharif, would be a significant loss if they were forced to drop everything and leave.

Although the Geneva accords would require a cessation of military aid to the guerrillas, there is no guarantee at present that the Soviet Union would stop supplying the Kabul government or refrain from supporting it. As Abdul Wakil, the Afghan foreign minister, stated recently in Geneva, “Aid given to terroristic groups is totally different from assistance given by one state to another state. Aid given to the Afghan groups (guerrillas) is one thing, but assistance from the Soviet Union for the past 68 years of our history is something else”.

And here is the real question mark. How long could the guerrillas



Outside supplies. Would ending them end the war? Photo: J. Gearing.

last without outside aid? One ‘moderate’ Alliance leader, Pir Gailani, betrayed his reliance on outside aid when he expressed doubts as to how long his own guerrillas could survive if their aid was cut off. Many guerrilla groups close to the Pakistan border have become dependent on the truck and horseloads of weapons and ammunition they have been receiving.

Foreign aid has in recent years played a key role in bolstering the political leaders of the Alliance and allowing them to maintain a degree of control over proceedings inside the country. If it were to be curtailed now, will these leaders retain their power?

Foreign aid has corrupted the Alliance. At present the leaders are only really a conduit for aid and a rallying banner. The present guerrilla Alliance could collapse without the glue of foreign aid. And if this happens, the emphasis of the war will shift to the commanders operating inside the country.

At the moment some major commanders are getting together in their strongholds to discuss how to proceed. The way the guerrillas on the ground perceive the war differs markedly from the perceptions of the political leaders living comforta-

bly in Peshawar. They take little notice of the talk of peace. With Soviet and Afghan government military operations continuing on the ground, they see no indications of an imminent Soviet withdrawal.

In this respect the mistake the Alliance political leaders have made is not to have worked more closely with their commanders in the field. Some have tried. Hekmatyar has attempted, and succeeded in many cases, to keep a tight control on his men. Khalis has, in the past, fought alongside his men. Rabanni has recognised that some of his commanders have a level of regional autonomy. But generally the political leaders of the Alliance exert only limited control over their men on the ground.

Many young commanders, in effect, do have regional autonomy. Most of the guerrilla groups well away from the Pakistan border are less dependent on outside support and have in many cases been successful only because they have had to go out and capture weapons and ammunition.

But the political leaders of the Alliance, it seems, have not only become increasingly distant from the views of the guerrilla commanders. They may also have become

THE GENEVA TALKS

In 1980, at the prompting of the UN General Assembly, the Secretary-General of the UN appointed Senor Javier Perez de Cuellar as his 'Special Representative' to attempt to find a peaceful solution to the Afghan question. In 1982 Perez de Cuellar became the Secretary-General of the UN and he appointed Senor Diego Cordovez as his own 'Special Representative'.

Since 1982 Diego Cordovez has undertaken numerous shuttle talks involving the Afghan government, Pakistan, the Soviet Union and Iran. These have been punctuated by a series of 'indirect' talks, held in Geneva, between the Afghan government and Pakistan in which Diego Cordovez has acted as the intermediary.

Both the Soviet Union and Iran have been kept informed as to the progress of the Geneva talks. But throughout, the Afghan Mujahideen, one of the parties to the war, have been unrepresented.

Since 1985 the talks have centered around the timetable for a Soviet withdrawal. At no stage however have the talks addressed perhaps the most basic question of who is to govern Afghanistan during and after a Soviet withdrawal.

The following is a brief chronology of the talks:

16th June 1982

— First round of 'indirect' talks begins in Geneva between the Kabul government and the Pakistan government. Both parties agreed in principle that a settlement should include the withdrawal of foreign troops, the return of the refugees and negotiated guarantees of non-interference.

11th April 1983

— Second round of talks begins in Geneva following visits to Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan by Senor Diego Cordovez.

12th-14th August 1983

— Third round of talks. 'Substantial progress' was said to have been made in defining the elements of a comprehensive settlement.

24th-31st August 1984

— Fourth round of talks. For the first time both delegations were in the same building at the same time; the talks were therefore described as 'proximity' talks instead of 'indirect' talks.

20th-24th June 1985

— Fifth round of talks. These saw the virtual completion of a bilateral agreement of non-interference and non-intervention and a bilateral agreement of the voluntary return of refugees. The text of a declaration of international guarantees was drafted and submitted to the two guarantors; the USA and the USSR.

27th-30th August 1985

— Sixth round of talks. Failed to make progress due to the Kabul government's insistence on direct negotiations with Pakistan.

16th-19th December 1985

— Seventh round of talks. Suspended after the continued insistence by the Kabul government on direct negotiations with Pakistan.

5th-23rd May 1986

— Eighth round of talks. These focused on the timing of a Soviet troop withdrawal but made little progress.

31st July-8th August 1986

— Ninth round of talks. The talks again centred around the timeframe for a withdrawal of Soviet troops but the disparity between the proposed timetables remained great.

25th February-10th March 1987

— Tenth round of talks. 'Significant progress' was reported, with the gap between Pakistan and Kabul government proposals for a withdrawal timetable narrowed to less than a year. The Kabul government reportedly put forward a timetable of 18 months while Pakistan proposed 7 months.

7th-10th September 1987

— Eleventh round of talks. Called at the request of the Kabul government talks further narrowed the timetable gap, with Kabul reportedly proposing a period of less than 18 months.

March 1988

— These talks are still in progress at the time of going to press. Although the accords previously under negotiation appear to have been agreed upon, the talks seem to have stalled. Pakistan has insisted upon discussing the nature of an interim government before signing the agreement. The United States has introduced the necessity for a 'symmetrical' aid cut-off to the Mujahideen and the Afghan government. The outcome of these talks remains uncertain. In future the focus of negotiations may move away from Geneva and towards direct negotiations between the superpowers.

alienated from the Afghan civilians, both inside the country and in the refugee camps.

Amid all the negotiations, the voice of the Afghan civilians is seldom heard. Ultimately it is they who have the strongest desire for peace. But not peace at any price.

From conversations with people inside Afghanistan, whether on their land or in hiding from Soviet attack, it is clear that there is widespread dislike of the PDPA. Often it is because they have been bombed, or dragged into the army, or a relative has been killed, or imprisoned; there are many reasons for hating the

regime. Despite the regime's programme of 'national reconciliation' and the stress it has recently placed on its Islamic character, it cannot escape from its own past.

But the views of the civilian population, although important, are not the key to the future of Afghanistan. This lies instead in the hands of the guerrilla commanders fighting inside the country. Only they have the real capability, the real power, to bring the communist regime in Kabul to its knees.

Yet will this objective be disrupted by inter-group conflict? And will the internal commanders be able

to make the painful readjustment to the cessation of foreign aid?

With splits in the guerrilla ranks becoming increasingly clear, it may be that the ground is now being set for a bloody civil war in Afghanistan. In a carefully stage-managed exit, the Soviet Union's withdrawal could leave the field open to a chaotic power struggle.

In such a scenario, who will gain the upper hand — the guerrillas or the regime the Soviet Union has been backing for so long? This could be a gamble that Gorbachev feels he has some chance of winning.

THE ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN

David C. Isby

While the war in Afghanistan is very much one of the Soviet Army against the Afghan people, it remains that the Republic of Afghanistan (ROA) Army has done the bulk of the fighting on the Communist side, extensively involved in every Soviet offensive in 1979–82 and many of those afterward. The ROA Army is responsible for the entire war in the eastern provinces, along the Pakistan border, as the Soviets will use the quisling regime troops to garrison areas, especially those away from the cities, roads and airfields.

It is still 15 year old Afghan conscripts who do much of the dying for the Soviets and Dr Najib. While the ROA military is full of Resistance sympathizers and its units and soldiers may switch sides when given the opportunity, they are still Afghans. Afghans fight very hard and very long, even if they are in the uniform of a regime whose perceived legitimacy is still relatively minimal. This has been reflected in many of the battles in the course of the war. ROA garrisons have withstood Resistance sieges and assaults at Khost, Urgan, and Barikot.

In 1986–87, the ROA military was faced with an increasing challenge, a Resistance better armed and more effective than before. In 1987, the use of Stinger and Blowpipe SAMs made airpower less effective. This not only forced the Soviets to place less emphasis on helicopter-inserted forces and helicopter gunships in their June 1987 Paktia offensive, but calls into question the continued viability of many of the smaller outposts, manned by the ROA, that relied on air re-supply. Yet despite these increasing threats, the ROA military has not lapsed into the sort of mass collapse situation that characterized its performance in 1979–80. While small units have continued to rally to the Resistance, there have been no brigade defections, no provincial capitals abandoned as in 1979–80. The ROA military may have stabilized its strength, and capability, although at a low level, and the Soviets are now seeking to increase its performance.

The ROA armed forces are, operationally even if not directly, an adjunct of those of the Soviet Union. The Soviet way of counter-insurgency warfare, as seen against the Basmachi in the 1920s and in the Polish Civil War in 1944–49 has stressed the importance of forming and using effective local forces against guerrillas.

For the Soviets, however, despite years of working with the Afghan military that stretch back to the 1950s, this capability has still proven difficult to attain. The Soviets have tried to create and use ROA armed forces as a cost-effective, albeit inefficient and often unreliable, counter-guerrilla force.

The ROA Army cannot be seen outside the overall context of not only the Soviet-ROA relationship, but also the divisions within the PDPA regime, and the extensive use of militias. The militias, in addition to uniformed forces, represent an attempt to build on existing Afghan loyalties and divisions, although their reliability so far has been rather low.

The Soviet-ROA relationship is a difficult and complex one. Operationally, repeated reports by former members of the ROA military and government state that the real authority is held not by Afghans, but by

Soviet 'advisors'. The Soviets have stressed a broad range of ties with the ROA. These include not only economic, trying to integrate Afghanistan as an adjunct to the Soviet economy, but a broad range of politburo-politburo, party-party, military-military, border troops-border troops and secret police-secret police ties as well as the most apparent government to government relations. The Soviet use of the ROA Army has its importance in establishing control as well as resolving the war. This is significant because since 1984, the Soviets have emphasized the political element of the war. Politics and diplomacy often decide the course of counter-insurgency conflicts.

In 1986, the Soviets started to try and achieve what was at least the appearance of the creation of an independent ROA operational capability. Unlike the 1986 policy, in 1985, after the ROA failure in the first attempted relief of Barikot, Soviet troops had to be committed to the border in large numbers. In the relief of Barikot and the attempted relief of Khost in 1985, while ROA forces still made up most of the order of battle of these operations, it was the Soviets, especially heliborne forces, that had to carry the burden of the fighting, something the Soviets have been reluctant to do, especially in the border country. In the interior, as far back as the Panjsheri VII offensive of 1984, ROA participation was reduced to a token commando brigade.

In 1986 large-scale offensives against Zhawar and Herat were carried out mainly by the ROA Army, which actually had to do most of the fighting. The Soviets had one or two brigades in each operation to 'corset' the Kabul regime forces. The Soviets, obviously, have become more sensitive to their own casualties. They remain unconcerned about ROA losses. The use of ROA forces enabled the Soviets to deploy more troops against Zhawar in 1986 than they did against Khost in 1985. They also had less hesitation about pushing troops forward and accepting the resulting casualties.

By 1986, the Soviets certainly wanted the ROA to be perceived as having an independent operational capability. This has been seen in small things, such as the institution of the 'Hero of the ROA' decoration. Certainly more significant in 1986 was the press attention given to General Abdul Ghafour as Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations. He was proclaimed as the operational commander of the Zhawar and Herat offensives. Of course, the real significant commander would be his Soviet 'minder'.

Ghafour does not have a reputation for competence nor one for hard fighting. Treachery seems to have been much more in his line, as he is believed to have been in Soviet pay as a KGB informer before 1978, according to former ROA Army colleagues. Attending the Vorshilov Staff Academy in the Soviet Union he showed little skill or application, but informed on other foreign students for the Soviets. He is also not directly associated with a PDPA faction, but rather seems to give his loyalty directly to Moscow. He was twice retired from the ROA Army as part of the political in-fighting. Resistance sources consider him lacking in knowledge or authority, a political placeman. An ethnic Baluch, his promotion

is thought to be an example of 'base-broadening', much as he did when he came out in favour of the 1979 invasion.

The Army's nominal chain of command runs from Najib to the Minister of Defence, the Chief of the General Staff, and the three geographical corps commands (Kabul, Kandahar, Herat) and independent divisions and brigades. But real authority is in the hands of Soviet advisors, present from the highest to lowest level in the ROA command structure.

In 1978, the Afghan Army had a nominal strength of 110,000 and an actual strength of about 80,000; by the end of 1980, it was down to about 20,000. In 1987, the Army had a maximum strength of about 40,000 although there is probably about an annual loss of 10,000 men through desertion, de-mobilization and casualties. Conscripted by press-gang.

ROA units are all understrength. Divisions are normally the size of weak brigades. The paper organization of ROA units means little, although infantry divisions and regiments still retain their basically triangular structure of three three-battalion infantry regiments, an artillery regiment, and a tank or assault gun battalion, but adapted to the mission of each unit and the share of resources it can obtain.

Most of the ROA strength is deployed in garrisons ranging from small detachments to regiments, with some divisions more concentrated. Divisions have tended to become a geographic rather than an operational command, exercising control over ROA units in an area. A major operation, such as the Zhawar offensive of 1986, will draw on units throughout the country. Because divisions cannot abandon the defensive tasks that consume much of their manpower when they are tasked with a requirement to support an offensive, each division will form a force of its deployable elements and put them under the command of an operational group headquarters. This accounts for long lists of divisions committed to battle in many offensives, although each may only contribute a few hundred or a few thousand troops.

While the ROA military has had much of its equipment lost in the early war period replaced by improved Soviet versions — BTR-60PB APCs have replaced lost BTR-152 APCs and 122mm D-30 howitzers have replaced at least some 133mm M-29 howitzers — the Soviets have not given the ROA hardware commensurate with their share of the combat burden. One of the reasons the ROA Army is in such poor shape is that the Soviets are afraid of it turning, *en masse*, against them. Soviet actions and troop movements suggest it was their prime concern in the December 1979 invasion. Despite this, the guerrillas have advance notice of most major Communist offensives.

The Soviets have built up forces competing with the unreliable Army as a system of checks and balances. The *Sarandoy* is the successor to the former Gendarmerie. Tactically indistinguishable from regular army units, although they lack artillery, they are made up of serving conscripts and organized in provincial regiments, reinforced by militia 'helpers'. Tactical units of the police are involved in counter-guerrilla and anti-Parchamite fighting, under Ministry of Interior direction. Most significant of all ROA forces is the WAD, successor to the KHAD. The 60,000 strong ROA secret police is an extension of the KGB and has an extensive net of agents and informers, plus assassins and torturers. KHAD para-military units operate in the field with the Army. The Border Troops were transferred to the Ministry of Tribes and Frontiers from Defence Ministry control in 1983. Built up as a balance to the army and linked to Soviet KGB Border Troops, militia organizations include locally or tribally based groups bought off by the Soviets, along with para-military groups such as armed PDPA cadres, 'Revolution Defense Groups', Pioneers, and the Youth Wings of Khalqi and Parchamite parties.

David Isby is an American military analyst who has studied extensively the situation in Afghanistan.



Former soldiers of the Republic of Afghanistan Army. Photo: Peter Jouvenal.

WITH THE RUSSIAN MUJAHEDIN

Radek Sikorski

When I met Sergiei Busov in a mountain guerrilla base in Afghanistan in October he smoked between one and two packets of cigarettes a day depending on how often we were bombed by the jets. Every day he climbed to the top of a mountain with an anti-aircraft missile to try to shoot down the attacking planes, but I could see that the roar of diving planes and the boom of explosions, multiplied by the echo, gave him a nervous tick. "One doesn't have nerves of steel", he complained. For three years he and his friends, Vladyslav Naumov and Vladimir Plotnikov had been with the Hezb-i-Islami (Khaless) guerrilla party fighting the Soviet Army from which they had voluntarily defected.

Sergiei comes from Perm on the Ural, and in Afghanistan he drove armoured personnel carriers in the Bagram division. Then only 19, he escaped from the Soviet Army in desperation, out of fear for his life. As a young conscript he was badly mistreated by the *stariki* ("old hands"), that is soldiers who have served more than a year. He told me how he was once beaten up because he did not have any needles with white and green thread. "The following day I was beaten up again because I was found to have three needles, and the old hand on duty decided that it was one needle too many." On another occasion, when he was already in his bunk, two old hands had a wrestling match. "One of them yelled an order at me to fetch a mug of

water and pour it over his sparring-partner. 'Don't you dare,' said the other, 'I will kill you if you do.' Whatever I did would have given them an excuse to beat me up." They did, savagely.

Many soldiers starved because the old hands grabbed everything for themselves. He saw recruits picking through refuse bins in search of scraps of food, and he came close to doing likewise. "But in letters to my mother I had to say that everything was fine, that the food was good and plentiful. All the outgoing mail is censored and letters which implied that anything was not as it should be are simply destroyed. On the very day of my escape I had a letter in my pocket addressed to my mother, and again the letter stated that all was well, that she should not worry that I am not getting enough to eat." Throughout my stay Sergiei never refused food, even when he had just eaten a big meal.

He described his growing apprehensions about what he and the Soviet Army were doing in Afghanistan. "Two days after I arrived in Bagram I travelled in a transport convoy to Puli-Kumri. Before the convoy rolled a colonel warned us of the possibility of ambushes. I immediately thought of Americans and Chinese who had been frequently mentioned by our officers. Strangely enough, it did not occur to me that I might be killed, on the contrary, I hoped to catch a glimpse, even at a distance, of an American mercenary. But I never

saw one. I travelled between Kabul and Mazar-i-Sharif several times, and was always on the look out for any signs of American soldiers, but with no success. 'Forget about Americans,' a drunken officer once told me, 'there aren't any here.'"

One evening he watched the bombing of a large village near Bagram. Eight Mi-24 helicopters hovered over it for a long time, dropping bombs and launching rockets. When they flew away the village came under fire from BM-21 rocket launchers and artillery. "I was unable to tear my eyes away from this sight. Could everyone in that village have been an enemy? What about the women, the old men, the children, how can they all be enemies of the Soviet soldier?"

He finally decided to escape when someone stole parts of the engine of his GAZ-66. He was told by an old hand to steal them from someone else, or be punished which, he says, could have been beating to death. The old hand confiscated his Kalashnikov, but Sergei stole three bayonets and three magazines of bullets in the hope of trading these for bread. When he ran away search parties were sent out into the countryside to find him. One armoured column with 50 soldiers came close to where he lay asleep after he had collapsed of exhaustion. He ran again to the mountains until he met a couple of shepherds. Surprisingly, they understood immediately what he was, fed him, and led him to the Mujahedin.

Vladyslav Naumov, from Volgograd (Stalingrad), who was a sergeant in the 66th Brigade stationed at Jelalabad, also witnessed the cruel treatment of young soldiers. In his unit an old hand killed a young recruit who had made a mistake in dress — he had put on somebody else's greatcoat. Naumov recalled an evening when a dozen old hands of Central Asian stock decided to enjoy what they called 'a concert'. Two young recruits were ordered to strip naked, to tie kerchiefs around their heads, and dance and sing in front of them. Later the two were ordered to engage in homosexual activity, and one of the old hands joined in the orgy.

"They lied to us from the start. When we were put aboard a plane the officer in charge told us that we were going to Poland. This was done to prevent any attempts at desertion before take-off. Imagine our despair when we found ourselves in Kabul! We were brought to the base and became virtual prisoners, surrounded by minefields and barbed wire."



Vladim Plotnikov (centre), treating a wounded Afghan. Photo: Radek Sikorski.

He told me that the Afghan communists and the Soviet military hate each other almost as much as they hate the Mujahedin. In 1983 he was personally involved in a military clash, with exchange of fire, between Soviet forces and Afghan communists near Jelalabad. The Russians feel that it is the fault of the Afghan communists that they, ordinary Soviet citizens, have been drawn into an alien conflict.

"Violent clashes on a national basis occur within the ranks of Soviet forces themselves," he told me. "I particularly recall one such flare-up on a training base in Termez in Uzbekistan between Central Asian and European conscripts. Both sides armed themselves with straps and makeshift cudgels, and fought for several hours. Two soldiers were killed in that fight. I recall thinking at the time that this belt-buckle fight was a mini-Afghanistan."

He said that up to a half of the Soviet soldiers in Afghanistan take drugs. Many also smuggle heroin, cocaine and hashish to the Soviet Union, for example in planes that ferry the sick and the wounded. The officers, on the other hand, hit the bottle. "They drink each and every day without limitation. To liven up their drinking-sprees the officers would call in the Soviet prostitutes servicing our division. A drunken officer once complained to me that these bitches would soon go too far because he had to pay 50 roubles (£50) for a night."

While in a post near Kama, Vladyslav gave weapons to the local Mujahedin. An informer must have betrayed him and he was jailed by the KGB. Major Makarov had chlorine water put in his cell up to his ankles. The vapours gave Vladyslav inflammation of his eyes, nose, and throat. After a month of this, on 5 ounces of bread a day, beaten up daily, he pretended to agree to show the Major his accomplices saying they only came to the village at night. He made his escape in the darkness, and the guards shot above his head.

When I met them in last October they had been fighting with different Hezbi units for two years. The first year they were kept prisoner. They managed to break out, but were apprehended close to their destinations: the consulates of United States and West Germany. However, when the leadership of the party thus learned that they had no wish to return to the Soviet Union, and when the Russians converted to Islam, they began to trust them.

They acquired a unique, elevated position among the guerrillas. The caravan which brought me to the camp also brought, in addition to several boxes of Dunhills for them, a Panasonic video camera. Sergiei made films during the day which the Mujahedin watched in the evening on a huge television set powered by the camp generator. Throughout my stay they slept and ate in the same hut with me and the commander (or on its roof when the fleas bit harder than usual). They discussed with him stratagems and military operations. I



Vladyslav Naumov. Photo: Radek Sikorski.

talked to them in Russian despite the fact that none of the guerrillas understood the language. They were not even referred to as defectors, they were Russian Mujahedin.

All three were given the best Kalashnikovs the unit possessed as a special sign of favour. They carried these on long walks I made with them into the mountains, during which they told me about the salmon farm they want to start when they get to America.

When the Mujahedin under the command of Abdul Qadeer attacked the Afghan army post at Debala in Nangrahar it was Sergiei, Vladyslav and Vladimir who assembled, positioned, and fired the heaviest piece of guerrilla artillery, which set the fortifications on fire — a Chinese 107mm rocket launcher. During the siege they launched a Soviet SA-7 heat-seeking anti-aircraft missile at one of the groups of jets which bombed us daily. The missile exploded in the proximity of one of the jets and later

reports from Jelalabad claimed that the plane crashed near the airport, at Surhrud. This would have been the second jet downed by the three in addition to several helicopters they say they destroyed on the ground in their rocket attacks against airports.

When I was with them they were becoming bitter. They had asked several Western governments for refuge but not a single one gave them a reply. I was carrying desperate letters to Mrs Thatcher and the Queen. They had been told that President Reagan promised to let them into the United States, but six months had passed without a word. But while we lay in the Autumn sun at the anti-aircraft position wondering why everyone had forgotten them, an operation to spirit them out was already under way. They were granted political asylum by Canada within a month, and live there now with a Russian orthodox community.

THE BATTLE OF KHOST

Floris van Straaten

A major clash between the Soviet-Kabul forces and the Mujahideen over Khost became almost inevitable after the guerrillas began receiving Stinger anti-aircraft missiles last year.

These enabled the resistance to cut off Khost's last reliable link with the outside world. After the Mujahideen had taken positions with Stingers around the airport by the middle of November, the city could no longer be supplied by air. All overland routes had already been firmly in the hands of the guerrillas for most of the eight years of the war.

The Afghan government and its Soviet allies had no other choice but to dispatch a major force to clear the main, 122 km. road from Gardez to Khost. The alternative would have been a surrender of this garrison town with some 30,000 inhabitants, which could have had disastrous consequences for an already shaky regime in Kabul.

Afghan leader Dr Mohammed Najib made no secret of the importance he attached to the relief operation for Khost. In the presence of dozens of foreign journalists he told a Loya Jirgah (council of elders) meeting in Kabul at the end of November about the plight of the civilians in the besieged town. He gave the guerrillas an ultimatum and threatened to send a major force if they did not lift the siege in 20 days.

Khost, sometimes called 'Little Moscow', has special significance for the regime. It has traditionally had a large contingent of communist supporters as well as a garrison of some 8,000 men. Giving up this stronghold of communist power might have been interpreted by many as a signal that the Kabul government no longer had the will or the strength to defend its supporters.

For the Mujahideen initially there was less at stake. Their original aim was simply to exert as much pressure on the Soviet-Kabul forces as they could. However, after a couple of weeks, they let themselves be carried away by the new momentum the struggle around Khost was rapidly gaining.

Soviet television broadcast pictures of the fighting, which were also picked up by many networks in the West, while the Soviet Foreign Ministry in Moscow held regular press briefings about the latest developments at Khost.

Much to the convenience of the authorities in Moscow and Kabul, the fighting around Khost was eventually seen as a major contest between the Soviet-Kabul forces and the resistance. The Mujahideen, with their usual ineptness in handling public relations, did

little to dispel this idea.

But from the outset there was hardly any doubt that if the Soviet-Kabul forces wanted to clear the road from Gardez to Khost, they would be able to do so. Skilful guerrilla fighters though they are, the Mujahideen are not sufficiently equipped to prevent a major regular army with air support from reaching a particular place in Afghanistan.

The only question was, how much effort it would take the Soviet-Kabul forces to achieve their aim. As it turns out, the price has been heavy, both in terms of casualties and equipment.

The Afghan government troops, which were often neither trained nor motivated, suffered large numbers of dead and wounded. As on previous occasions, several hundred Afghan conscripts defected to the resistance.

But it was not only the Afghans who paid a price. The Russians too suffered substantial losses. An Afghan eyewitness described, for example, how on December 28th the Soviets lost several dozen paratroopers after staging an abortive attack against one of the main bases of Mujahideen commander Jalaludin Haqani (who was later injured in the knee by shrapnel) at Sarana.

Western diplomats in Islamabad quoted Afghan medical staff in Kabul as saying that hundreds of dead had been brought to the capital from Paktia province.

An American newsman also reported

how the main road to Khost had been covered with the debris of Soviet and Afghan government armour. Altogether, the Soviet-Kabul forces lost at least half a dozen aircraft too.

The Russians and the Afghan government used their air force intensively. British cameraman Peter Jouvanel, who spent about 10 days in the Khost area, confirmed that massive bombardments had been carried out. However, the planes had been flying at very high altitudes and they had therefore lacked accuracy, he said. In addition, the Mujahideen had been well dug in and only direct hits could threaten them.

There were several reports that the Mujahideen had tried in vain to shoot down bombers with Stingers.

Considering the intensity of the bombing and of the artillery fire, the casualties of the Mujahideen were low. Although exact figures are not available, the total number of dead and wounded probably did not exceed 500. Hospitals in Peshawar and Miram Shah, close to the Khost area, said they had only a few serious casualties from Khost.

These reports contradicted claims by the Soviets that the Mujahideen had suffered 2,000 casualties.

Jouvanel noted that the Mujahideen sometimes moved out of particular areas in anticipation of heavy bombardments, which could explain why casualties remained low. Casualties were also reduced because most civilians had left



Mujahid with a Stinger Missile. Photo: Saira Shah.

the area before the fighting broke out.

Reports from various independent observers at the battlefield indicate that the fighting at Khost was less intense than both sides were claiming at the time.

It is now beyond dispute that the communist forces have been firmly in control of the Gardez-Khost road since New Year's Eve. They control an area of five kilometers on either side of the road and are currently in the process of establish-

ing security posts along the road. Jouvenal said that he had even seen individual vehicles moving along the road without any special protection.

The Mujahideen are belatedly trying to play down the significance of the operations at Khost. Politically speaking, they have already lost this battle to their communist adversaries. However, militarily they are by no means defeated.

Analysts in Peshawar agree that it will be extremely hard for the Soviet-Kabul

forces to maintain their control over the long and hilly road to Khost in the longer run.

Hundreds of guerrillas are currently on their way to the Khost area to assist their colleagues and the Mujahideen appear to be determined to regain some of their lost prestige. With the present military situation more conducive again to their guerrilla warfare, they might have some unpleasant surprises in store for the Soviet-Kabul forces.

IN MEMORIAM PROFESSOR SAYD BAHAUDDIN MAJROOH

Floris van Straaten

At the end of a year's stay in Peshawar, I went for a farewell visit to Professor Majrooh, who had been not only one of my best contacts throughout the year but also a good friend. "I hope to see you in Kabul the next time we meet," I told him. Majrooh smiled. The next day he was shot dead at his doorstep.

Professor Majrooh was a unique figure in the Afghan resistance movement in Peshawar. Although strongly committed to the fight against the communist regime in Kabul, he carefully kept a distance from the Mujahideen parties in Peshawar. As the director of the Afghan Information Centre, he collected his own information on the progress of the war inside Afghanistan and was generally regarded as a much more reliable source than the parties themselves.

For foreign journalists visiting Peshawar, Majrooh's office was always one of the first stops. In fluent French or English, he would explain the current situation and give his own, always reasonable views. His independence did not mean that he did not have outspoken views on many issues. Majrooh strongly backed the idea of a return of former king Zahir Shah, whom he regarded as the only Afghan with sufficient support to head an interim government in case of a Soviet withdrawal.

Although Majrooh, who was 58, did not appear to have political ambitions himself, he might have played a significant role in post-war Afghanistan. He once told me that his wish was to supervise the de-sovietisation of the Afghan education system. A former dean of the faculty of literature at Kabul University, he was very much aware of the need to train a new generation of bright young people who could lead the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

His discussions with visitors and work for the Information Centre took up most of his time but he tried to continue his work in other fields too. Shortly before his death, for example, he prepared a selection of Sufi wisdoms and jokes, which he intended to publish in English.

Majrooh's relationship with the parties in Peshawar was sometimes tense, notably with the so-called fundamentalists. He regarded the parties as a product of the war and argued that they did not have roots among the Afghans at large. He predicted their quick demise once a settlement on Afghanistan would be reached. The angry young men in the fundamentalist parties, on

the other hand, accused Majrooh of trying to restore the 'ancien regime' and criticised his somewhat westernised way of life.

In pre-war Afghanistan Majrooh had indeed been a prominent figure. After taking a PhD from Montpellier University, he became a professor at Kabul University. He also worked as Afghanistan's ambassador to West Germany and as the governor of Kapisa province.

Following the Soviet invasion in December 1979, he tried initially to protect the academic community in Kabul but was then forced to flee himself. Like many other Afghan intellectuals, Majrooh could easily have gone to the West and accepted a position there as an academic. But he refused to take the easy way out and instead established the Afghan Information Centre in Peshawar in 1982. Its bulletin rapidly gained a reputation for being one of the most reliable sources on the resistance and the war in Afghanistan.

Majrooh's death has caused great concern among Afghan intellectuals in Peshawar. Although the identity of the killer is still unknown, they fear that his murder is only the beginning of a series of political killings. Private western aid organisations, who employ many educated Afghans, are also worried.

The assassination comes at a time when both the Kabul regime and the Mujahideen alliance are trying to lure intellectuals living abroad to their side. Looking for ways to give its so-called policy of 'national reconciliation' a new impetus, the Kabul government has invited intellectuals to return to the Afghan capital. However, despite the latest wave of diplomatic activity, few are expected to respond to the government's call.

Simultaneously, the leader of the seven-party Mujahideen alliance, Yunis Khalis, has urged educated Afghans to come to Peshawar and help prepare their country's reconstruction. Despite their differences with Majrooh, Khalis and representatives of the other resistance parties (with the notable exception of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hizb-i-Islami) attended his funeral. Their presence was partly meant to show the intellectuals that it was high time to join hands.

Whatever role Afghan intellectuals will play in the next few months, Majrooh's reasonable voice will be badly missed.

CROSSING THE BORDER — Part II

"Some international crises — the Ethiopian famine, for instance — capture the world's imagination and immediately provoke a compassionate and constructive response. The plight of the Afghan people has not been one of these."

With these words *The Afghan Tragedy* provokes readers to ask themselves why there is so little concern about Afghanistan. Launched in January 1988 this booklet seeks to draw attention to the plight of Afghans, both within the refugee camps of Pakistan and inside Afghanistan. It is produced by ten British voluntary agencies who are working in the area and provides a moving description of the immense human cost of the war. [*The Afghan Tragedy* is available from Afghanaid for £1.50 plus 50p p&p].

In the second part of our feature on humanitarian aid inside Afghanistan, Dr Simon Mardel gives a personal account of his work with the French organisation Aide Médicale Internationale and of the conditions he encountered during a three month mission inside Afghanistan. Also in this feature Floris van Straaten examines the state of agriculture in Afghanistan.

WORKING WITH AIDE MEDICALE INTERNATIONALE

Dr Simon Mardel

Four organisations currently send medical teams inside Afghanistan; Médecins Sans Frontières, Médecins du Monde, Aide Médicale Internationale (AMI) are all French, and Health Unlimited which is based in England. None of these organisations are government backed which is why they are able to cross borders illegally into places such as Afghanistan.

I have worked twice with AMI in the Panjshir region of Afghanistan, a well organised valley North East of Kabul which extends into the Hindu Kush mountain range. My first mission there, three years ago, unfortunately coincided with a large Soviet offensive against the Panjshir, so my experiences at that time were probably unusual. Our team of two doctors and two nurses ended up travelling nearly a thousand miles, mostly on foot; and the work we carried out was often on the run or while hiding in remote villages. While these conditions were far from ideal, we gained a great insight into the life of these people. Living among them high in the mountains, they provided us with bread and tea while in return we gave them the little medical and surgical care we could offer.

This summer (1987) I returned there, using a much safer route through the mountains of Nuristan. The high passes of this route are blocked by snow for eight months of the year. It took us ten days of walking and our 250kg of equipment was carried by four horses. With me was Bartran a French nurse working for his first time in Afghanistan.

We found the Afghans well organised and we were able to work in a small

hospital where we carried out clinics, performed a few simple operations and taught basic medicine and surgery to the Afghan students. This last task is the most important part of our work. Some of these students had been taught by previous French teams inside Afghanistan. Others had attended courses in Pakistan, and since 1985 AMI, in collaboration with the Belgians, has also been training Afghans in a hospital in Peshawar.

In our spare time we surveyed a village nearby. There we found that only a tenth of the original inhabitants remained and

that with many families living in caves or shelters, conditions have deteriorated considerably. Diseases preventable by immunisation (measles, whooping cough, diphtheria and tetanus) are common among the children. Tuberculosis, like other diseases of poverty, is also widespread.

In this region the mothers I spoke to revealed more sensible customs in feeding their children than I had previously given them credit for, and although they breast feed for two years they introduce fruit, rice and vegetables into the diet after six months. They treat diarrhoea



Six year old injured by shrapnel during offensive in Panjshir valley, spring 1984. Night-time operation under general anaesthesia to amputate right arm and to remove shrapnel from face. Photo: Simon Mardel.

with an extract from a plant called Pudina, this is almost certainly a type of hyoscine like the 'Lomotil' prescribed by some doctors over here. Although it stops diarrhoea symptoms it is more important to encourage drinking fluids.

I also found out how they treat impetigo (a skin disease with pus and crusts usually affecting childrens faces). They apply a mixture of mud blessed by the local mullah with his saliva. This explained why the lesions were so dirty, why the parents resisted washing them and probably why the condition in Afghanistan takes so long to clear up.

With no women in our team, treating the Afghan women was more difficult this time. Usually I had to talk to them via their husbands or someone from their village. Examining them also posed difficulties and twice I ended up treating patients without even seeing them, which made me feel very unprofessional but like everything in Afghanistan you had to consider what was the alternative.

The Mujahideen I saw all lived in barracks separate from the villages. Many of them complained of minor knee injuries which I presumed were from running down mountains. Some had malaria following visits to malaria regions such as Pakistan or nearby Andarab. I saw a few cases of typhoid among the Mujahideen probably related to poor hygiene. Although all Muslims are careful about cleanliness it did strike me that, as with any group of men living together, standards were often lower



A convoy of arms and supplies at Kantiwar pass (c. 15,000ft) on their way into Afghanistan, October 1987. Photo: Simon Mardel.

than in the villages. In the course of examining them I was surprised at the very large proportion of them who bore scars from the war. Fortunately the only serious wounds we had to treat were those of a Mujahid shot in the chest and another injured by a mine.

Compared to my first time in Afghanistan we lived well. We slept in a small cave which was cleaner and more comfortable than my old 'on call' room at Westminster hospital! We usually had

enough food (mainly rice, bread or beans) which we supplemented with the fruits which were in season — mulberries, apricots, apples and walnuts.

After three months we left, arriving in Pakistan a week before the snows came which blocked the mountain passes. Later the snows will arrive in the villages lower down and I can't help thinking how bleak the winter will be for those families I met living in rough shelters and with few belongings.

PLOUGHING AGAINST THE ODDS

Floris van Straaten

Afghanistan's once famous grapes are still on sale in Pakistan but they sadly reflect the problems of the country's agriculture: they have often shrunk to a pathetic size. "Last autumn, I saw some grapes from Afghanistan here in Peshawar," commented one Afghan refugee. "I couldn't believe my eyes. They looked like little berries not like grapes."

These grapes illustrate how eight years of warfare have thoroughly uprooted Afghanistan's traditional agricultural economy, in which some 85% of the population used to be engaged. The provinces where agriculture seems to have been hardest hit by the war are Kabul, Parwan, Logar, Laghman, Nangarhar, Paktia, Kandahar, Herat, Faryab and Zojjan.

Half of Afghanistan's 24,000 villages, for many centuries the core of this economy, have been badly damaged, if not destroyed by the fighting and the relentless bombardments by the Soviet-Kabul air force. The hostilities have also

resulted in one of the biggest refugee flows of this century.

Certain areas in Kunar province, for example, are reported to have lost 90% of their pre-war population. 'Ghost towns' have emerged all over the border areas with Pakistan.

There are no reliable statistics on the depopulation of the rural areas nationwide but several experts have come up with their own 'educated guesses'. Dr Ray Hooker, a consultant to the American government development aid agency (USAID), estimated in 1987 that 32% of the pre-war settled rural population had left their homes.

But to Azam Gul, a former professor of Agronomy at Kabul university, Hooker's guess seemed an underestimate. According to him, the available evidence indicated that at least 44% of the farmers and their families had sought refuge in the Afghan cities or abroad.

While it is difficult to estimate the number of people who have left the countryside, it is even harder to assess

the damage done by the war to Afghan agricultural production. Currently Professor Gul is preparing an agricultural survey of Afghanistan for the Swedish Committee in Peshawar. His findings, based on extensive research inside Afghanistan will be published this year. Gul estimates now that between 55 and 70% of the country's pre-war agricultural output capacity has been destroyed.

The depopulation of the rural areas has led to a great shortage of labour. Many farms have been deprived of their best workers as most men between the age of 16 and 45 have either joined the Mujahideen, fled abroad or have been conscripted by the Afghan government.

In areas of heavy combat, agriculture almost invariably suffers. Just two recent examples illustrate this: in August 1987 the Soviets staged a major offensive against the Mujahideen in the Shomali area, north of Kabul, traditionally a region of rich farming lands. The military operations resulted in thousands of

refugees who fled to Kabul and the destruction of numerous vineyards and orchards. Western diplomats in Islamabad reported that as the fighting subsided, some farmers tried to return and save their harvest. But the Soviets denied them access to their own lands. As a consequence, the crops were left rotting away.

In another case in the northern province of Jozjan in early August 1987, a battle took place between the Mujahideen and the Soviets for the village of Jangal Rareeq, close to the town of Aqcha. The Jamiat party in Peshawar said that after the Soviets succeeded in capturing the village, they burnt the crops and destroyed the remaining houses.

Transport in the country is largely disrupted. Most roads have been destroyed by bombardments of the Soviet-Kabul forces, while others have been mined. In some cases the Mujahideen themselves have torn up the roads to make it more difficult for their opponents to enter the area.

Many farmers who used to sell their surpluses in markets far away from their home villages can no longer do so. They have got neither the labourers to create a surplus nor the transport to take their goods to the market. Young farmers are also reluctant to visit the bazaars in the bigger towns for fear of being rounded up by the Kabul authorities for military service.

As a result, the area under cultivation has declined dramatically. Large areas have been totally neglected for years. "There are now fields in Nangarhar, for example, where weeds are growing up to the height of a man", Professor Gul told the Afghanistan Information Office in Peshawar.

Gul carried out a survey among more than 700 owners of bigger farms in 1983. He found that by 1982, on average, farms had already reduced their acreage of wheat by 63% compared to 1978. Wheat, used for the staple food 'nan',



Terraced fields, Nangarhar province. Photo: James Reed.

is by far the most important crop in Afghanistan. Other major crops such as rice, barley and cotton showed a similar downward tendency. It is to be noted, however, that small farms were probably affected to a lesser extent by this decline.

The yield had also dropped considerably. The survey found that between 1978 and 1982 the average wheat yield per acre fell by 46%. That of rice 65% and of barley by 40%.

There are no reliable figures for the wheat crops of the past eight years. But one can safely assume that it has been far below pre-war levels, when Afghanistan had managed to become self sufficient in its wheat production.

Significantly, in 1982 Afghanistan had to import 240,000 tons of wheat from the Soviet Union. According to a report by the US State Department in December 1986, the Afghan cities are largely fed from imports, with about half of the imported grain coming from the

Soviet Union.

These grain imports make Afghanistan more dependent on the Soviet Union. Especially in the northern provinces farmers have recently been encouraged by the Kabul authorities to grow cotton for which by far the most important market is the Soviet Union. This policy also appears to be aimed at increasing Afghanistan's dependence on the Soviet Union.

Traditionally, most Afghan farmers depend on irrigation of some sort. However, the war has destroyed thousands of the canals and terraces that are so typical for large parts of the Afghan countryside.

Even when the country was at peace, the irrigation systems required permanent attention. After spring floods, for example, in some areas more than 1,000 men were needed to restore the canals. But to assemble as many as 1,000 able-bodied men in one place now poses a serious security risk.

The men form an easy target for aerial bombardments. Gul cited reports that the Soviet-Kabul forces had sometimes deliberately bombed dams, apparently trying to draw out the Mujahideen for their repair.

For years farmers have been reported to work during the night for security reasons.

The remaining farmers are faced with other problems too. Those who used to own or rent tractors have to cope with desperate shortages of parts and fuel, which they generally have to buy on the black market. Many tractor farmers have moved back to the familiar pairs of oxen.

However the price of these draught animals has risen rapidly. Today a pair of oxen may cost up to 70,000 afghanis (about £250), a huge amount for a small farmer. He will not lightly decide to spend so much money, especially if the oxen run a fair chance of being killed in a bombardment. Fertilizer and seed have become rare commodities, result-



Working on the irrigation system. Photo: Habib Kawyani

ing in steep price increases for both. It used to be mainly the government that distributed fertilizer and the more Kabul lost control over the countryside the less of it was being distributed to farmers.

As farmers are often no longer in a position to visit the regional bazaars, they cannot buy new seeds and have to depend on their own old seed, in many cases resulting in degenerate wheat. Herbicides have become a rare item too.

"For most farmers the entire situation has become rather haphazard", commented an Afghan agricultural expert who preferred to remain anonymous for security reasons.

Animal husbandry has also suffered badly during the war. Some estimates say that up to half the country's cattle may have died. Countless animals were killed in the fighting while others had to be slaughtered early for lack of feed. Apart from the fighting, the livestock is also bound to have declined due to the dry weather Afghanistan has had over the past few years.

The export of the skins of Afghanistan's famous Karakul sheep, which used to be the country's single most important export item, is also believed to have dropped considerably.

Another major problem for the Afghan agriculture is the extent of the deforestation in the country as a result of the war. Trees and other forms of vegetation are of vital importance to the control of the country's extensive irriga-

tion systems. Without them the chances of floods and soil erosion are much higher.

Large forests in Paktia, partly the result of pre-war West German development projects, have vanished completely. Some of this is due to bombardments but most was the work of woodcutters. Similar reports have come in from other parts of Afghanistan.

There is considerable evidence that the Kabul authorities have deliberately deforested certain areas to deprive the Mujahideen of this natural shelter. Many trees were reportedly cut down around Kandahar for this reason, while Afghanistan's main roads have been cleared of all vegetation within at least one kilometer of the road.

The fuel needs of internal refugees and their livestock also put extra pressure on the already sparse vegetation in some areas. Many orchards have completely dried up in the absence of proper irrigation.

While most damage to the agriculture can be repaired within a few years, the reforestation will take dozens of years and several future generations will have to live with preciously few proper forests around them.

Relief agencies in Peshawar are slowly waking up to these problems and have begun thinking about ways to reconstruct the Afghan countryside.

After a future return of refugees to Afghanistan, a high priority would be to

bring back under cultivation land that has been neglected for years. The farmers must try to get rid of the weeds in these areas and make sure the soil is suitable again for fresh crops. Large quantities of seed, particularly wheat seed, will be needed too. Of crucial importance will be the quick repair of the irrigation canals.

Professor Gul estimates that provided enough foreign aid is available it will take at least two to three years to bring all the old land back under cultivation but it might well take longer. Gul predicts that the reconstruction will be a very costly operation too.

Large reforestation schemes should be started as soon as possible to prevent further erosion and floods. Trees will also be vital for the fuel supply of the local population and their shade will give some relief during the warm summers. The latter is not without significance in a country short of fans and air-conditioners.

However, one problem that will become increasingly apparent is the lack of qualified Afghans to supervise the national reconstruction. Even before the war Afghanistan did not have an abundance of highly educated people.

But despite the colossal task ahead of his country, Gul is not pessimistic: "The Afghans are at hard working people. They can really do the job if they have the opportunity," he says.



Oxen Ploughing. Traditional farming methods predominate. Photo: James Reed.

THE VALLEY OF BAMIIYAN

Nancy Hatch Dupree



A tourist attraction before the war. The Greater Buddha, Bamiyan. Photo: J. Gearing.

The resonant clang of bells alert one to the passage of camel caravans long before proud chieftains on spirited horses prance by, followed by long lines of bulky camels padding silently midst the rustling patter of thousands of sheep and goats. Dark-eyed damsels robed in shawls, heavily embroidered with gold, sway atop gaily caparisoned camels. The children are tucked safely into panniers. Here and there baby camels gambol awkwardly for the amusement of all.

Camel caravans have enlivened the Afghan landscape since time immemorial, criss-crossing this land exchanging the riches of India with those of Europe, Persia, Central Asia and China. Midway through the arduous Hindu Kush mountains the caravans rested in the valley of Bamiyan where bustling caravan-*serais* catered to their needs.

Twice during this long history the valley of Bamiyan acquired special renown. Once it was an important religious centre. Once its ruler incurred the wrath of Genghis Khan.

During the second century AD when the fabled Silk Route between Rome and China flourished, the Kushan King Kanishka ruled from Northern India to the Gobi Desert and acquired much wealth and power by exploiting his central position on the lucrative trade route. Most importantly, Kanishka's revitalization of Buddhism encouraged Buddhist missionaries from India to join the trade caravans. Thus Buddhism and its art styles, including the Buddha figure, passed from India to China, via Afghanistan. At Bamiyan the missionaries established a monastic centre of such renown that it would excite the admiration of Chinese pilgrims for a full seven centuries. As late as 632 AD one Chinese pilgrim reported that there were ten monasteries in Bamiyan attended by over 1000 priests.

The principal wonders of Bamiyan were two colossal standing Buddha figures, 180 feet and 125 feet tall, carved into the face of a sandstone cliff. The larger was robed in blue, the smaller in red, their faces and hands glowed as though gilded,

and myriads of precious ornaments dazzled the eye. A staircase carved within the cliff, behind the niche of the small Buddha, permitted the faithful to perform the ritual of circumambulation and numbers of chambers off this staircase were used as chapels. In addition, in the half mile between the two standing figures there were hundreds of chapel-caves and grottos, some with seated Buddha figures.

The facades of these caves were carved with realistic representations of wooden structures such as jutting roof beams, doorways and windows, all painted in vibrant poly-chromatic hues. Inside the caves and niches a profusion of paintings utilizing a syncretic iconography from Greece, Persia, Sino-Siberia and India emphasised Bamiyan's pivotal position. In addition, many conceptualized the cosmos in which the Buddha evolves from the sun in order to illuminate the world. These mystic diagrams represent the earliest specimens of cosmic mandala found today in Nepal and Tibet.

Bamiyan was an awesome religious experience for pilgrims. Even in ruin it ranks among the world's most remarkable encounters, treasured in memory by all 20th century travellers in Afghanistan.

The rise of militant Hinduism in the East and the advent of Islam in the West eclipsed the Buddhist centre in Bamiyan. Sometime after the 9th century AD, an Islamic City was built on the plateau overlooking the cliff of Buddhas. This city's moment of greatest splendour, however, came during the middle of the 12th century under the Shansabani Kings of Bamiyan who were described by their contemporaries as patrons of literature and the arts and dispensers of justice. Their lofty citadel was surrounded by a city of garden-villas with sparkling tiled facades. But the Shansabani reign was short, aborted by rivals from Central Asia who, in turn, were utterly destroyed by Genghis Khan in 1221.

Today only an occasional colourful tile washes from the heap

of ruins which is the citadel now called Shahr-i-Gholghola — the City of Noise — in memory of the screams rising from the final massacre in which Genghis Khan fulfilled his vow to kill every man, woman and child, bird, animal, insect, in retaliation for the death of his favourite grandson who was killed in the valley by freedom fighters resisting the foreign invaders.

The citadel was left in deathly silence, the irrigation works

smashed beyond repair. And beyond Bamiyan, the trade routes were so disrupted that traders took to the sea. This provided the final blow to Bamiyan's prosperity. Even 20th century roadways by-pass Bamiyan, boring through the Hindu Kush via the Salang Tunnel some 100 miles to the east.

The valley of Bamiyan rests in relative peace in the midst of war.

Review **AFGHANISTAN: AGONY OF A NATION**

by Sandy Gall

John Gunston

Afghanistan: Agony Of A Nation is Sandy Gall's second book about his travels with the Afghan Mujahideen. Very similar in style to his previous account, he again visits the legendary Commander Ahmed Shah Masud in the Panjsher to make a documentary for Central Television.

He is accompanied by Noel Smart, a Central TV cameraman and Andy Ctrykowiak, the doyen of Afghan cameramen. Their trip is delayed immediately on arrival in Islamabad, to be told by the Mujahideen that they must wait until the snow clears from the passes. The eloquent and poetic Masud Khalili tells him that he must stay in the Pakistan capital because, "Peshawar is full of KHAD and KGB spies and someone as well known as you will be spotted immediately."

This allows time for rounds of golf on the links and time to catch up with his old chum President Zia, whose name is put to good use when dealing with minor officials. Zia bids him farewell: "We'll be praying for you."

After three weeks they finally set off from Chitral, with the irrepressible Masud Khalili from Jamiat. Within the first few days they encounter the bureaucratic vagaries of the Daulat in Nuristan, where they undergo interrogation by Arabic Wahabis. Their involvement in the war with "the Koran in one hand, chequebook in the other", has been one of the causes of much of the internecine fighting amongst the Mujahideen. Gall goes into the reasons of this, with a prophetic warning of the belligerent attitude of Hesh-i-Islami led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

Arriving in Kantiwar, the capital of Nuristan, they are treated with hospitality by Haji Ghafor the Heshbe commander of the region whom we are told is a great friend of Andy's. A sad reflection, for a year later it is believed that men of his were responsible for Andy's murder; as Heshbe commanders have been instructed to curtail media support for Masud.

The journey over the mountains is extremely tough and Gall, then 59, struggled over the mountain passes of 15,000 feet and more, sometimes clinging to a horse's tail for support, while Andy sped along in front to film. Anyone who has made the fearsome climb

over the numerous passes to the Panjsher can empathise with his difficulties and admire his courage at doing so. His dreams of "lots of *frites de poissons* and fresh fruit, accompanied by copious draughts of white wine", have been had by all those who have crossed the Durand border; though one can only read with envy his accounts of fish and chips brought to him by Jan Moham-med.

When they reached the ever elusive Masud, greetings are short as Masud explains his grand strategy: of preparation, then organising the Mujahideen in the mountains and the plains, followed

guerrilla commander: crack shot, weapons' instructor, staff college lecturer and, of course, general command-ing".

Gall watches Masud directing the attack on a series of Afghan army bases, using British radios to keep in contact with his various commanders. Andy, meanwhile, is characteristically in the thick of it, pinned down during the attack on the last fort. He had managed to get some tremendous footage earlier, when a Mujahideen shell exploded right on target, destroying a machine gun post. The attack was successful, initially carrying four of the five forts, killing up to a hundred, capturing fifty-three with another fifty deserting as well as seizing a lot of equipment, all for three dead. Surprisingly Gall leaves before the subsequent attack, which finally captured the main fort.

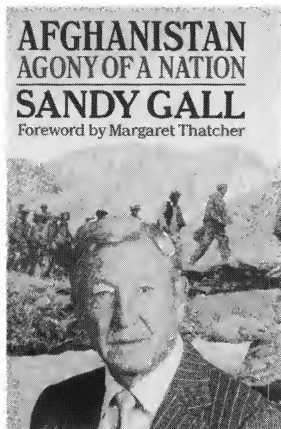
Their journey takes them out by the same route through Nuristan and Kantiwar, where they again stay with Haji Ghafor, who immediately asks Andy for his saddle. "It's yours", Andy told him. "And the bridle as well." The next time Andy passed through was October 1987, and that was the last time anyone has seen him.

Gall ends his book with the harrowing accounts from the survivors of the Chardarra massacre. He does not waiver in his condemnation of the Soviets, "I believe . . . that the Russians have been pursuing a policy of genocide — the extermination of a race — in Afghanistan since Christmas Eve, 1979."

Though uneven in parts, probably due to the short time taken in the writing, the book describes a journey by a man one can't help but admire for embarking on such an adventure at his age. For his work on Afghanistan, Sandy Gall was awarded the Lawrence of Arabia Memorial Medal in 1987. He also received a CBE in the New Year Honours' List.

The Prime Minister concludes her introduction to the book referring to the understanding of the nature of the war and of the Afghan resistance: "This book makes a valuable contribution to that understanding".

John Gunston is a photographer and journalist who has travelled extensively in Afghanistan since the beginning of the war.



by the offensive stage which he was then engaged in, finally the general mobilisation of everyone in the country. Masud's ability, is recognised by Gall, who describes him as "a potential Tito".

He is fortunate, for Masud is planning his most important operation since his attack on Pushghour in 1985, and includes groups from the north all under one operational command. Prior to the operation Masud checked his men's readiness personally, impressing on Gall the attributes that make Masud unique in Afghanistan. "We had a good demonstration of Masud as the complete

VIEWPOINT

Nick Danziger



Nick Danziger. Photo: Terry Wheeler.

In 1984, a young Englishman, Nick Danziger, set out alone and with little money on a journey across Asia. In the book about his exploits *DANZIGER'S TRAVELS — BEYOND FORBIDDEN FRONTIERS* he described how he illegally slipped into Afghanistan from Iran, travelling through Herat and past Kandahar into Pakistan. Although the journey was far from easy, the warm reception he received from the people and from Ismail Khan, the most important Resistance commander in the west of the country, appears to have lessened the hardship. In an interview with Julian Gearing he described his impressions of Afghanistan.

"The sense of hopelessness was appalling, particularly around Herat where it was so flat and the Mujahideen had nothing to hit back with. It was a matter of; was I going to survive the next bombing raid and who else would? Every time there were casualties. Quite often the helicopters used to come in just waiting for someone's nerve to break, to break cover. You're pinned down and the feeling of claustrophobia

with nothing to do but break out was terrible. That is what they are trying to do, to force people to break cover so they could attack".

"When I arrived initially, a bombing raid was taking place and my first question was where were the bomb shelters, the underground shelters. But there was nothing like that at all. I asked them why not and they said that if a bomb landed on them they would be buried. But this is

ridiculous. It certainly would have offered protection, if not for the Mujahideen, then for the civilians".

"Food was always a problem. When I toured with Ismail Khan in the mountains we went specifically to look for safe stores, for places to store food, also looking into the possibility of setting up hospitals. There was a crying need for medical supplies and the trained personnel to deal with the war injuries. When they were injured, both Mujahideen and civilians said that they would rather die in Afghanistan than be taken to Iran where the conditions they are left in are appalling. I have never seen anything like the conditions the injured have to live in in Iran. No sanitation, no running water, rooms crammed full of war wounded, people who hadn't come round from their operations, people paralysed. People feared not being properly looked after".

"There is a great myth built up of how strong and how dignified the Mujahideen are. When they were under attack, when they were hiding in the dry irrigation channels, they certainly didn't want to die. It is not the situation that was faced during the last century where they were on equal terms with the enemy. Today they are fighting against helicopters, jets, and mobile troops. They are certainly a very brave, proud people but they are not like the Iranians who appear willing to run into minefields. And I feel there is a great difference between those who are really committed to fighting in the front line, and those who hold a gun and parade around whilst others do the fighting. There is a lot of bravado. Around the city of Herat those that went in on a nightly basis to attack, often very young men, were remarkable people".

"It is a young man's war, with all the long marches involved and all the hardship. There are old men who say they would dearly like to kill a Russian before they die, but it is the young men who do the fighting. The best guerrilla commanders have picked their men carefully, taking into account their ability to fight and move around the country".

"The interesting thing about Herat is that although it was a very populated area before the war, today it is almost devoid of population, and I think that some of the leaders have gained the respect and maturity that otherwise would have been unobtainable during

peacetime. Nonetheless, there are still commanders whose position is related to the extent of their wealth, not their military performance. This certainly disturbed me as there were certain things that were lacking in terms of their grasp of guerrilla warfare. Mind you, in their position without the benefits of seeing films or reading books on the subject, a knowledge of tactics must be difficult to gain. And therefore it was extremely frightening to go to an area where I felt I had a better knowledge of the situation. I know nothing of military tactics, but much of it is commonsense".

"Before I went to Afghanistan I had the impression that it was an undeveloped country. Having visited South America, particularly Bolivia, one of the poorest countries, I felt there would be parallels to be drawn. Certainly on this trip through Asia it was the poorest country I visited. This was not only due to the war. Going into the remote areas there is no infrastructure whatsoever. It is one of the saddest aspects of Afghanistan today that it is so backward, so medieval. The country has so much potential. I think I was more astonished than I expected. I expected to find poverty and misery but the kind of scale it existed on was unimaginable".

"I don't feel the Mujahideen's cause is my cause. When touring the rural areas, the Mujahideen would point out proudly that this was a government school they destroyed or this was a road that the government was building. Those things, having been educated in the West,



A beautiful Afghan girl, soon to disappear behind the veil. Photo: Nick Danziger.



Sixty of us crammed into the back of a truck, sitting ducks for enemy aircraft.

Photo: Nick Danziger.

were deeply disturbing to me. For me at least it has to be asked what sort of a society will be left if the Soviets do withdraw. Some would like to see the kind of situation that exists in Iran. Others would like to see a more democratic, westernised system of government. It is very difficult".

"Islam is the motivating force behind the Resistance. To quote Ismail Khan, 'the Soviets used their satellites with which they can see everything we do, we have Allah'. I think it is very difficult for us to understand that Islam is a way of life, not just a religion. It is a very powerful force in their lives. Every day is geared around their religious practices. I used to get particularly frightened at prayer times because that was when the Soviets used to come in with their Migs and helicopters. Even in a very difficult situation the Mujahideen would stop for prayers".

"Not that there is always a bond between Muslim brothers. At the time I was there, in 1984, the relationship between the Afghans and the Iranians was poor. There was a lot of animosity, particularly in Khorasan province which has a lot of refugees. The Afghans have taken up a lot of the economic structure of the area and therefore bad feeling has built up. There have been riots between Iranians and Afghans in Mashad, partly due to the fact that the Iranians would like to see the Afghans fall under their influence. Khomeini would like to see himself as the leader of Muslim people, including the Afghans".

"Conflict between different Mujahadeen parties was a problem. I remember being pleased to hear that Jamiat and Hisbe had agreed to fight alongside each other. Yet two days later, when I was travelling with sixty men, in two different groups, one group arrived late that evening. And they were very proud. There had been a fight and I expressed my surprise that there were Soviets in the area. But they said no, the fight was with Hisbe".

"Whilst there are groups outside of Afghanistan, for example in Peshawar, who claim to represent the people inside, certainly many of the people inside feel let down by these leaders. They feel they don't represent their own particular views. There are men who have been fighting for seven years inside the country and they see these leaders on the outside who are quite happy to make decisions on their behalf and to talk a lot. But when it comes to funding and weapons, the commanders inside are very much at odds with the leaders outside. At the end of the day, the loyalty of the people fighting inside lies with their commanders, not with those outside the country".

"I hope my book will make people more aware of the situation. There are so many conflicts going on in the world and I think we in the West benefit from all this turmoil. It's a way of keeping countries down, of keeping our place. I think we are very much to blame for the situation. I very much believe that the West would like to see the Soviet Union tied down in Afghanistan."

ANDY SKRZYPKOWIAK

Julian Gearing

The sad news emerged at the end of last year of the death in war of Afghanistan of Andy Skrzypkowiak.

In a war that has received little film documentation it is remarkable that one man should have been responsible for so much of the best and most dramatic film that has emerged. Andy possessed the fitness, determination and courage to film events from very close quarters, as was so memorably demonstrated by his action footage of the ambushing of Soviet convoys on the Salang highway and in Sandy Gall's documentary **AFGHANISTAN — AGONY OF A NATION**.

Most of his efforts were directed at filming the forces of Jamiat-i Islami commander Massoud in action. Paradoxically, this may have led to his death.

There has long been speculation that the Hesbi Islami party, led by Gulbudeen Hekmatyar, was the cause of much of the infighting between guerrilla groups inside Afghanistan.

But it was not until 1987 that a series of incidents involving Western journalists and aid workers brought home to observers what was happening.

On their way to Badakhshan, doctors working for Médecins sans Frontières were held captive before finally being released without their money or supplies. In September, on the way out through Kantiwar, two journalists, myself and a colleague, had our film and tape cassettes stolen at gunpoint and our guide was beaten up. In October, personnel belonging to a French aid organisation, *Guilde de Raide*, were held up near Kantiwar and had their aid funds stolen. In November, journalist Anthony Davis working for *Asiaweek* magazine was held with colleagues for three days, this time by Hesbi Islami in Laghman, on his way out to Pakistan.

But the worst incident was the murder of Andy Skrzypkowiak. Up until recently the story was unclear. Now, pieced together from eyewitness reports and the confession of a man held in prison in Pakistan, the following picture has emerged.

In October Andy set off with his Afghan guide across the border heading for the Panjshir Valley. They were aware of a potential problem at Kantiwar and so they slipped through the village at night.

According to an eyewitness, an Afghan horseman, they were seen in daylight four or five hours beyond the village heading for the Kantiwar pass. One hour later the horseman was stopped by four armed men, who asked if he had seen a man fitting Andy's description. Some time after this the men caught up with Andy near the Kantiwar pass. They told his guide to go and said that they would not allow Andy to continue. They were going to take him back.

The next reported sighting was by some lapis lazuli traders who claim they saw Andy in heated argument with the four men during which Andy hit one of them. He was then escorted back down towards Kantiwar village. After six hours walking they stopped near the first habitation in an area called Chaman. Here they had a conversation in which Andy said they should take his camera gear and let him go free. After some discussion the men agreed. Taking out his sleeping bag, Andy then went to sleep by a wall.

During the evening the men debated what to do. They were concerned that because of his knowledge of Farsi he may have realised that it was they who had stolen the money from the *Guilde de Raide* team and kept it for themselves. They were aware that Andy knew Haji Ghafoor, their commander in Kantiwar, and it was obvious that he was not afraid and so might complain to Haji Ghafoor and to the Pakistan authorities. They decided to kill him. Finding a boulder they lifted it onto the top of the wall and then dropped it on his head while he was sleeping. In the morning his body was dragged in his sleeping bag and buried on the other side of the nearby river.

This story emerged after the eyewitnesses reached Pakistan, and followed the arrest by the Pakistan authorities of four Afghans with a large amount of money who fitted the description of the armed men. One of the group gave the details of what had happened to the Pakistan police and stated that they had been sent, on the instructions of Hekmatyar, to stop Western journalists and aid workers. They had specific instructions to stop Andy and the *Guilde du Raide* team. The man's confession was passed on by the Pakistan police to Andy's wife, Chris Gregory.

Hekmatyar initially denied that any of his men had anything to do with Andy's death. Yet the men allegedly involved arrived at the Hisbe Islami base in Kantiwar in the early summer of 1987 and were working with the local commander, Haji Ghafoor, and his brother. Their job was not just to cause problems for the few Westerners who travel through, but also for top ranking members of Massoud's organisation. The tragedy is that this rivalry has resulted in the death of a man who has done so much to document the Afghan war.

Before he set off into Afghanistan for the last time he discussed with his wife the possibility of being killed. "Andy said he wanted to be buried in the mountains of Afghanistan," said Chris Gregory.

This quiet and private man leaves behind a wife and a young daughter. He will be greatly missed by the few who were lucky enough to know him.

STOP PRESS: The Pakistan police are alleged to have recently released the men suspected of killing Andy Skrzypkowiak. Only two men remain in custody over the question of stolen aid money. A body, thought to be that of Andy Skrzypkowiak, has now been found, two days walk from Kantiwar.



Andy Skrzypkowiak filming commander Massoud and commander Pannah in conversation.

Photo: J. Gearing



Andy Skrzypkowiak with Ahmed Shah Massoud. *Photo: J. Gearing.*